OVERVIEW

THREE ARTICLES ABOUT THE IMPACT OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY TO CONTEMPLATE AND DISCUSS.

Is Technology Truly Connecting Us?

(From The Flight From Conversation, by Sherry Turkle. NYTimes Sunday Review)

We expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies:

- That we will always be heard;
- That we can put our attention wherever we want it to be;
- And that we never have to be alone.

Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved.

When people area alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device. Here connection works like a symptom, not a cure, and our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being.

Think of it as 'I share, therefore I am.' We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings as we're having them. We used to think, 'I have a feeling; I want to make a call.' Now our impulse is, 'I want to have a feeling; I need to send a text.'

So, in order to feel more, and to feel more like ourselves, we connect. But in our rush to connect, we flee from solitude, our ability to be separate and gather ourselves. Lacking the capacity for solitude, we turn in to other people but don't experience them as they are. It is as though we use them, need them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves.

We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely. If we don't teach our children to be alone, they will know only to be lonely.

(By Sherry Turkle, psychologist and professor at MIT, in NYTimes Sunday Review, April 22, 2012)

SCHUMPETER

Slaves to the Smartphone

The Economist

THE HORRORS OF HYPERCONNECTIVITY – AND HOW TO RESTORE A DEGREE OF FREEDOM

Mar 10th 2012 | from the print edition

"THE SERVANT" (1963) is one of those films that it is impossible to forget – a merciless dissection of the relationship between a scheming valet (played by Dirk Bogarde) and his dissolute master (James Fox). The valet exploits his master's weaknesses until he turns the tables: the story ends with a cringing Fox ministering to a lordly Bogarde. The film was an indictment of the class structure of Harold Macmillan's Britain. But it is hard to watch it today without thinking of another fraught relationship — the one between businessfolk and their smartphones.

Smart devices are sometimes empowering. They put a world of information at our fingertips. They free people to work from home instead of squeezing onto a train with malodorous strangers. That is a huge boon for parents seeking flexible work hours. Smartphones and tablets can also promote efficiency by allowing people to get things done in spare moments that would otherwise be wasted, such as while queuing for coffee. They can even help slackers create the illusion that they are working around the clock, by programming their e-mail to be sent at 1am.

But for most people the servant has become the master. Not long ago only doctors were on call all the time. Now everybody is. Bosses think nothing of invading their employees' free time. Work invades the home far more than domestic chores invade the office. Otherwise-sane people check their smartphones obsessively, even during pre-dinner drinks, and send e-mails first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

This is partly because smartphones are addictive: when Martin Lindstrom, a branding guru, tried to identify the ten sounds that affect people most powerfully, he found that a vibrating phone came third, after the Intel chime and a giggling baby. BlackBerrys and iPhones provide relentless stimuli interspersed with rewards. Whenever you check the glowing rectangle, there is a fair chance you will see a message from a client, a herogram from your boss or at least an e-mail from a Nigerian gentleman offering you $1m if you share your bank details with him. Smartphones are the best excuse yet devised for procrastination. How many people can honestly say that they have never pruned their e-mails to put off tackling more demanding tasks?

Hyperconnectivity exaggerates some of the most destabilising trends in the modern workplace: the decline of certainty (as organisations abandon bureaucracy in favour of adhocracy), the rise of global supply chains and the general cult of flexibility. Smartphones make it easier for managers to change their minds at the last moment: for example, to e-mail a minion at 11pm to tell him he must fly to Pittsburgh tomorrow. The dratted devices also make it easier for managers in one time zone to spoil the evenings of managers in another.

Employees find it ever harder to distinguish between "on-time" and "off-time"—and indeed between real work and make-work. Executives are lumbered with two overlapping workdays: a formal one full of meetings and an informal one spent trying to keep up with the torrent of e-mails and messages.

None of this is good for businesspeople's marriages or mental health. It may be bad for business, too. When bosses change their minds at the last minute, it is hard to plan for the future. And several studies have shown what ought to be common sense: that people think more deeply if they are not constantly distracted.

What can be done to keep smartphones in their place? How can we reap the benefits of connectivity without becoming its slaves? One solution is digital dieting. Just as the abundance of junk food means that people have to be more disciplined about their eating habits, so the abundance of junk information means they have to be more disciplined about their browsing habits. Banning browsing before breakfast can reintroduce a modicum of civilisation. Banning texting at weekends or, say, on Thursdays, can really show the iPhone who is boss.

TOGETHER WE CAN OUTSMART OUR PHONES

The problem with this approach is that it works only if you live on a desert island or at the bottom of a lake. In "Sleeping with Your Smartphone", a forthcoming book, Leslie Perlow of Harvard Business School argues that for most people the only way to break the 24/7 habit is to act collectively rather than individually. She tells the story of how one of the world's most hard-working organisations, the Boston Consulting Group, learned to manage hyperconnectivity better. The firm introduced rules about when people were expected to be offline, and encouraged them to work together to make this possible. Many macho consultants mocked the exercise at first—surely only wimps switch off their smartphones? But eventually it forced people to work more productively while reducing burnout.

Ms Perlow's advice should be taken seriously. The problem of hyperconnectivity will only get worse, as smartphones become smarter and young digital natives take over the workforce. People are handing ever more of their lives over to their phones, just as James Fox handed ever more of his life over to Dirk Bogarde. You can now download personal assistants (such as Apple's Siri) that tell you what is on your schedule, and virtual personal trainers that urge you take more exercise. Ofcom, Britain's telecommunications regulator, says that a startling 60% of teenagers who use smartphones describe themselves as "highly addicted" to their devices. So do 37% of adults.

The faster smartphones become and the more alluring the apps that are devised for them, the stronger the addiction will grow. Spouses can help by tossing the darned devices out of a window or into a bucket of water. But ultimately it is up to companies to outsmart the smartphones by insisting that everyone turn them off from time to time.

Baroness Susan Greenfield – The Shape of the Mind

- Environment is key – we can adapt to our environment – neuroplasticity of the brain means we all have unique patterns of connection.
- It's not the contraction of the brain muscle through movement that grows our brain cells – it's the thinking!
- An enriched environment shifting from sensory experience creates pattern which then becomes a cognitive experience which we evaluate and make meaning and significance.
- Associations help us see the world in our view.
- A stimulating interactive environment makes our brain grow.
- By making connections we make checks and balances which gives a deeper meaning over time. E.g. wedding ring to a young child is just a ring but to a mature mind it has meaning.
- Meaningful happenings make you unique.

- We are in a changing world with rapid advances in genetic technology with ability to create bespoke therapy.
- Brain cells are being grown on a grid in labs.
- Nanotechnology is enabling amazing results with prosthetic limbs etc.
- Chip in the brain is near – trans-humanism.
- We can now take DNA and replicate any part of human body.
- Grey power – we will live to 100 first 50 years – 2nd 50 years.
- No generational boundaries.
- Recommended book to read by Stephen Johnston, Everything Bad is Good for You: Why Popular Culture is Making us Smarter (Penguin).
- 54% of teen Americans spend 30+hrs on social media.

- Social networking is changing the shape of the brain.
- We make connections in our brain through engagement with others words 10% Body lang 55% voice 15% pheromones and physical contact are essential parts of meaning and connection.
- Facebook you get 10%.
- We are losing ability to demonstrate empathy becoming more self-important.
- We are losing identity.
- Twitter for some is proof that I exist.

- Effects of gaming on brain are now evident.
- Damaged prefrontal cortex which accounts for 33% of brain activity.
- Prefrontal brain only matures late teens early 20's.
- More multi-tasking – less listening.
- Increased recklessness – taking excessive risks.
- Releases dopamine- pleasure drug released in brain.
- Shorter attention span.
- Notion of no consequences – let yourself go.
- Inability to make meaning and interpret.
- We are creatures that understand and think.
- High BMI is connected to under functioning prefrontal cortex.

- Effects of search engines on brain.
- We use less connectivity and meaning as it searches for us giving meaning but not context.
- This leads to less retention – how many of us remember phone numbers now?
- Lack of use of metaphor in knowledge provided means less enriched understanding.
- You miss narrative and meaning.
- Thinking is movement confined to the brain which creates patterns and stories (lack of context and metaphor means less story).
- Creative insight gives us meaning over time relating to identity.
- Creative insight makes you a unique person.

- Harnessing the brain for 21st Century.
- We must use technology to promote creativity.
- Living for moment is the norm.
- We need to become creative thinkers.
- Challenging dogma.
- See the world differently.
- See new connections – create new patterns.
- Use past present and future to make personalised meaning.

- The future is in our hands – literally.
- Damage limitation for Mind is the new Climate change for this generation.
- Higher IQ – shorter attention spans.
- Less literate, less risk averse more live for the moment.
- Older people learn differently from younger people because they use connections from experience - balance and checks with reference to metaphors from own enriched experience.
- Get creative and bring younger and older brains to learn together but differently.
- Implications for business – we need innovative soft wear.
- There is a new type of consumer, new type of workplace.
- We need to enhance the creative process.
- If we offer service to real customers it has to be exceptional otherwise they will buy on line – why would they not?